

Camp LEAD

by Lee Ann Luxenberg, Bonner Scholar Coordinator

Purpose

- Provides a free, service-based summer camp to local low-income middle-school children.
- Facilitates growth of students' leadership skills with opportunities to lead campers in activities such as swimming, hiking, canoeing, repelling, and community service.
- Raises awareness of environmental issues by using the natural resources of the campus and community.

Background

In 2000, a group of Bonner scholars decided to start Camp LEAD to create summer opportunities for low-income children in the area. They wanted to increase environmental awareness and make use of local natural resources.

How It Works

Campers

Sixth- and seventh-grade teachers from the 11 county and city elementary schools nominate children from their classes. The school principals then choose two representatives from each campus to attend. Altogether, twenty students make up each camp class.

Counselors

Bonner scholars and other student volunteers participate as counselors for the week. Up to two former campers are invited to come back as junior counselors when they reach high school. During the first year, all of the counselors were Bonner scholars. Since then, Bonner scholars, Bonner alumni and several students who are not Bonners have been counselors. One Bonner scholar each year is selected to be the camp's student director, supervised by the director of community service.

The Camp

Children come to campus for a Week-long camping experience. They participate in team-building, communication, community service, mountain biking, repelling, caving, hiking, swimming, kayaking, games, and crafts. At the end of the week, campers go whitewater rafting on the child-friendly Nantahala River.

Equipment

The camp purchases some equipment, which is used during the school year by college outdoor groups. Equipment owned by the college is available to the camp free of charge.

Training

Many of the counselors are outdoor enthusiasts and teach skills to the campers, including repelling off a building on campus. All counselors are CPR/rescue breathing-certified before camp starts.

What Makes The Project Unique

Camp LEAD targets children who need their self-esteem boosted, have social or behavioral difficulties, and/or can't afford to attend other camps.

The camp is free. All counselors are volunteers, and the college donates many resources. Camp LEAD's focus is primarily on outdoor recreation. The goal is to develop campers' self-confidence. Team-building and communication exercises prior to a rafting trip bring together children who wouldn't ordinarily meet before high school.

Benefits

Campers realize their own potential as they tackle and overcome obstacles, such as their fear of heights or being away from home. Campers learn about the environment in which they live, get to know other people, and become familiar with life on a college campus. Campers know that the counselors are volunteering their time, so the campers see the benefits of service.

Timeline

January

Secure funding from local philanthropic organizations and from Bonner Community Fund. Select camp's student director.

February

Develop tentative schedule. Update/revise camp brochures and applications. Begin recruitment of camp counselors including current Bonner scholars, current Union students, and Bonner scholar alumni. Begin recruitment of junior counselors from previous year's campers and junior counselors.

March

Deliver brochures and applications to schools. Finalize camp schedule and outdoor activities with director of outdoor activities. Complete recruitment of counselors and junior counselors.

April

Deadline for applications. Make reservations for whitewater rafting, camping, van use, and pool use. Set counselor training schedule, to be held three days before camp, which includes housing, meal money, and CPR/first aid training.

May

Send congratulation letters to chosen campers along with camp information, including what to bring, general guidelines, and camp schedule.

June

Set agenda for parents' meeting. Send finalized schedule to counselors and junior counselors. Buy supplies for camp. Arrange meals with cafeteria. Pre-event press. Request any funds needed from business office. Reserve meeting rooms and technical equipment for child pickup and an end-of-week slide show.

July

Counselor training: workshops, delegation of activities, supply/room preparation. Camp begins. Select junior counselors for following year from current junior counselors whose performance has been strong. Follow-up press. Set date for next year's camp.

Resources And Funding

Union College's Office of Student Life

- Provides free housing, assistance with events coordination, and supplies.
- Holds workshops for counselors.
- Allows use of pool, van, and gas mileage.

Aramark, Inc.

- Provides reduced-cost meals.

Barbourville Junior Women's Study Club

- Assists with a monetary donation.

Endless Rivers Adventures, Inc.

- Offers a reduced-cost rafting trip.

Bonner Community Fund

- Provides funds for supplies.

UC Community Service Office and Knox County elementary schools

- Provide other forms of assistance.

Evidence of Success

Several campers who participate in Camp LEAD's first year have returned as junior counselors. A Bonner alumnus and several Bonners who withdrew from the program have also returned to participate.

The camp is well supported by the local Women's Club because the foster sister of one of the women in the group came to the camp and was transformed by the experience. She was shy and lacking in confidence; now she wants to come back as a junior counselor.

How to Make it Grow

Increased grant money would allow more campers to attend and a longer camp stay that could include a visit to a space camp day at Hazard Community College Discovery Center.